



# *It is not easy* **Being Parents**

**Gijubhai Badheka**

Gijubhai Badheka was born on 15 November 1885.

He began his career by practising as a High Court lawyer. In 1913, the birth of his son set him thinking about child upbringing and child development. Looking for new ideas in education, he discovered the writings of Maria Montessori. So impressed was he, that he left his legal practice to devote himself to children and education. In 1920, he founded the first pre-primary school - Balmandir - under the aegis of Shri Dakshinamurti Vidyarthi Bhavan. This provided him with a rich opportunity to experiment with new ideas in education.

In the 19 years till his untimely death in 1939, Gijubhai worked incessantly, contributing a lifetime of work in the area of children's literature and education.

He left behind a legacy of prolific writing (nearly 200 publications for children, youth, parents, and educators.) Several of these have been translated into other languages, from the original Gujarati. They continue to inspire and guide generations of children and adults.

Timeless Truths On Parenting

Retold by

**Mamata Pandya**

## **Preface**

Gijubhai Badheka is perhaps best known as the creator of some of the best loved and popular children's literature in Gujarati. He is equally eminent as one of the pioneers of the Montessori system of education in India.

Abandoning the legal profession for which he was formally trained, Gijubhai took on his life's mission of advocacy of children and their rights. He could peep into the heart and mind of the child, laugh with the child, and cry with it; understand how bewildering the world of adults must appear to the child.

Gijubhai observed children and adults, and recorded his thoughts and ideas on the subject. He described the dilemmas faced both by parents, as well as by children, and explored possibilities of how these could be handled.

Gijubhai believed that every child has its own distinct personality. We, as adults, need to recognize and respect this. He urged adults to convert to the faith of trust, respect, freedom, and love for children.

Through his voluminous writings Gijubhai shared his vision with adults who interact with children, especially parents and teachers.

• Published by •  
**Utthan Sewa Sansthan**  
**Anand Niketan School**  
495, Thaltej-Shilaj Road,  
Ahmedabad. (India)  
Phone: 91-79-3739517, 3739661

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These are some excerpts from these writings. First published in 1935, they hold as true today, as they did nearly a century ago.

It is a special privilege to be able to share these timeless truths, from my own grandfather, Gijubhai Badheka, with other parents like myself.

**Mamata Pandya**

## **To My Parents**

## **Out to Lunch**

The table was laid, glasses filled and the food was to be served, "Come to lunch every one."

Champa and her mother had been invited to Navinbhai's place for lunch. Navinbhai and Shantaben had three children, a boy and two girls.

Navinbhai indicated the side of the table where four dishes were laid, and directed that the four children sit there.

Champa said, " Ma, I will sit next to you, not there"

The dishes for the adults were across the table. Mother said, " Sit with the other children, Champa. They have kept a place specially for you". "No", insisted Champa. "I will be next to you".

"But there is no place here".

"Well, then, I will sit at this place", declared Champa, pointing to the seat next to her mother. That was to have been Gauri's place. But Navinbhai realised that there was no point making an issue of it. "Very well", he said, " Champa, you sit next to your mother. Gauri, Why don't you take Champa's seat?"

So everyone took their seats. Champa's mother did not like what had happened. She did not say anything then,

but she gave Champa a stern look.

Lunch started being served. Champa had one demand after another. "Ma, just take my *katori*", "Ma put the *puries* on this side". "Ma, look, the *raita* is mixing with the *subji*, do something".

Mother said, "Champa look how the other children are managing. You are older than them. Why don't you take care of what is on your plate?"

Champa retorted, "Why don't you do it for me ? You do it for me every day at home".

Champa's mother couldn't say much. But she thought to herself that Champa had really acquired bad habits. She was becoming too dependent on her mother, and that was not good.

Fruit was served. Champa immediately demanded not one, but two bananas. Everyone else at the table was being served one. Mother said, "Everyone will get one, Champa". "Then I will also eat your banana". declared Champa. This time mother was stern, "No", she said, "you eat your's, I will eat mine."

Champa getting more obstinate. She whined and grumbled and threatened to take away her mother's fruit. And she did just that. Navinbhai got more bananas to serve mother. Champa's mother was very embarrassed.

The other children were eating happily, chatting and laughing softly as they ate. But not Champa. As soon as she started eating, she complained that the food was too hot.

"I don't like that", retorted her daughter, "You take it away from my plate". Before her mother could reply, Champa had put her *sabji* onto her mother's plate.

Champa's mother really ashamed of her daughter's behaviour. Especially so, in contrast to Navinbhai's children who were so well-behaved as they ate. She joined in a conversation with Navinbhai and his wife.

Immediately Champa interrupted, " Ma, listen to me. Why don't you listen to what I'm telling you ?" Champa's mother was involved in talking, so Champa shook her with the hand she was eating with, clamouring for attention.

Champa's mother was really upset. She just should not go out to eat, she thought to herself. But she also realized that it was not fair to blame it all on her daughter. After all, she thought, she is behaving here the way she behaves at home with her father and myself. She has got into these habits, and my getting irritated now will not change things.

Champa continued to be difficult right through lunch. She ate with both hands, she spilled food outside her dish. In short, she made a thorough mess. The contrast with the other children become glaringly evident as the meal progressed.

When lunch was over the other children went to wash their hands and mouth, and wiped their hands on the napkin provided. Champa asked her mother to wash her hands and promptly wiped her mouth on the sleeve of her dress.

Navinbhai was observing the child, and was also aware

of her mother's discomfort. He also realized that this was the reason why Champa's mother was keen to go back home soon after lunch.

Champa's mother could not restrain her tears. He gently introduced the topic that was disturbing her.

"Don't go yet," he urged. "Champa can be quite exhausting isn't it?" Children need to be guided from the beginning about what is good and what is not, and how to do things - to talk, to eat, to keep clean. And these shouldn't just be told, but demonstrated to them. After all, children are quick to imitate what they see."

"At mealtimes if children make too much noise, or fuss over what they like or dislike, or cry, or demand to sit whenever they wish to, it becomes tiring for everybody. I have been particular to keep special places, dishes and napkins for children. This makes them feel special, and also helps to keep to some order and routine."

"From the beginning we also have a code for mealtimes, based mainly on common sense and experience. For example, if someone is serving and you would like to have that item, raise your hand; or put aside something that you do not want to eat on the extra dish that is on the table. This code is not 'enforced', nor is there punishment for breaking it, but followed regularly, it does form certain habits."

If there is a problem I do not make an issue of it at mealtimes. I take other opportunities to talk with the children, to share their problems and their pleasures. I try, in this way,

to make them more self-reliant, and of course, happy".

Champa's mother had a lot to think about and digest. She invited herself to stay at Navinbhai's for a week to see herself how all this worked. Navinbhai warmly welcomed the idea. After all, was it not his main precept that children learn best by example, by seeing and doing.

## In Fashion

Fashion sometimes ignores convenience, sometimes even causes inconvenience. All fashions may not have great thinking behind them, and sometimes thinking people fall prey to fashion.

Children of fashion-conscious parents have also to swim with the tides of the times. Children are often made to exhibit what parents find fashionable, or what is 'in style' at the moment.

Take an example of girl's dresses. Most of these have buttons at the back. No one knows who thought of this style, but children wear it, parents demand it, and tailors stitch accordingly. So far, so good.

But what happens when a child wears a dress with buttons at the back? "Mother, do my buttons." "Daddy, please fasten my hooks." The parents are hassled with other tasks. The mother calls for the older sister, "Hey, help her with the buttons" or she yells for the servant, "Why don't you close the buttons for her?"

The child, with her own two hands, is helpless. She is dependent on someone else to complete dressing. She can not go out unless someone is around to button her up. She

has to request, or plead, or shout for this. She is dependent, all for the sake of being dressed in the fashion, a dress with buttons at the back !

That's just for dressing. What about undressing ?

If the dress gets wet, the child can't take it off. If she is feeling hot and feels like cooling down, she can't take it off. And heaven forbid, if her dress catches fire, she can't take it off.

But still the child wears such dresses. She likes them because her parents do. They like them, because they want their child to be "well dressed".

But, fashion is really a series of fads. Started somewhere, by someone who wants to be different, it sometimes catches on, and then everyone wants to follow blindly.

Sometimes the glamour of being different, or being in style, blinds people to the basic tenets of simplicity, comfort, and practicality in the way they dress.

We might, as adults, indulge in this. But when it comes to our children we must think first of their comfort and convenience with respect to what they wear. Even infants often show distinct preferences for what they like, or do not like, to wear. We can help our children by letting them participate in deciding what they would like to wear.

At our Balmandir we have a "front button" attendance.

Children whose clothes have buttons at the back take home a note requesting parents to get them clothes with buttons in the front. And, parents do make an attempt to do so.

Sometimes, they have not even thought about the difference it would make : That changing the orientation of a few buttons is indeed rendering a great service to their child.

## **But They Do Not Listen To Me**

Once two parents presented a complaint about their children. "They do not obey us."

The mother said, "They do not listen to me."

"They don't obey me", said the father. "What are we to do?"

I asked them a question in response, "Do you listen to each other?" I asked the parents.

The parents were perplexed.

The mother said, "I listen to him, but he never heeds what I have to say".

Father said, "That's exactly what I feel. I listen to her, but she doesn't take what I say seriously.

"That's exactly what is making your children disobedient," I said quickly.

There are many reasons why children become disobedient. One of these is the fact that, at home, they see their own parents in situations where they do not accept what the other has to say.

Especially when children are young, the adults are

their role models. And so they try to behave just as they see the adults behaving.

If men and women always did not listen to each other, nothing would work. People have to be open to each other. There are bound to be points of disagreement, even conflict or contradiction.

Sometimes these confrontations end in positive outcomes, people come closer, ties become stronger, support is reinforced. Some disagreement may be due to ignorance or shortsightedness on part of one or the other partner.

Yes, some degree of contradiction is natural. But we should not let our children suffer the consequences.

It is not essential that children must know, or be told, of all that the parents do and feel. Children learn many things with the passage of time. Parents will have differences. But, these differences must not be aired before children. Especially, care should be taken that acrimonious arguments and quarrels do not take place in the presence of children. Neither is it good to sulk, avoid each other, or deliberately oppose each other's views.

These points of friction are like dark rumbling clouds that cover the sky, making it overcast and gloomy. But, in most cases, the clouds do disperse to make way for the open skies that mark the marital relationship. But the storm clouds

leave a lasting impression on the child that arrives at its own conclusions about the situation.

If the impact is strong, it leaves the child distanced from the parents, sometimes disrespectful, and consequently disobedient towards parents.

Parents should curb displays of disagreement or acrimony in the presence of children. A child that grows under the clear open sky will grow up to be open and obedient, as compared to one that lives amidst the thunder and lightning of stormy skies.



## What To Do ?

Shantiben was at her wit's end. "What do I do with this girl", she whined, "Whenever she sets the table, she bangs down the plate and *katoris*. Nine times out of ten, she does this".

"Have you even told her to set the dishes gently?" I enquired.

"Ever?", she snapped, "Always. Every time she does this I have to tell her".

"But the one time out of ten when she does work quietly, do you tell her that that is the correct way of doing things ?" I asked.

"No", replied Shantiben. "What is there to tell. It's no big accomplishment if it does happen once in a while."

On the contrary, I said, " that's where we make a mistake. We are quick to point out a child's mistake. And we keep doing so, again and again, until the child almost forgets that there is another way. It even forgets that the mistake is a mistake. And the vicious cycle continues. It makes more mistakes, gets scolded more often, and then makes more mistakes."

But a child isn't always doing things wrong. It is equally

doing much that is correct and good. But this, we ignore or overlook, often do not even notice. We are always on the alert to catch and point out the mistakes, but not to point out and commend a good deed. What if we told the child that one time, " That is a neat table you have laid today. Would it not be nice to have it like this everyday?"

It could work wonders. The child is suddenly made conscious of something good that it has done. It will try to continue to do the same. It will even try to develop the skills to do even better.

A little encouragement - even acknowledgement - of the child's strengths can work as a great incentive for self improvement. To reinforce only the weaknesses, to point out only the faults, is to kill all positive incentives for the child.

A few words of encouragement or praise can pierce the dark recesses and brighten every act.

### What If ... ?

I was at a friend's place. The mother came up to urge the father to scold the son. Why? He made his baby sister run so fast, she could have fallen and got hurt, she complained.

My friend thought it best to diffuse the anger in his wife's eyes, and the anxiety in the little girl. Gently he smiled and asked her, "But you didn't fall and hurt yourself, did you? So why worry?"

Mother was unappeased, "But what if she had fallen?" she fumed. "What if she had broken a hand or leg? It's not right to let the boy get away with it".

My friend smiled again. "But no accident took place this time", he reminded.

"But what if she had hurt herself", insisted the aggrieved mother. She went away muttering about how she would take care of boy herself.

My friend was sensible. He saw the foolishness in worrying about a hypothetical situation, to scold or get angry about what could have happened.

Often seeds of great distrust and even enmity are sown simply on the basis of "what could have happened".

These are reflections of our own anxieties.

As adults we often tend to worry irrationally about situations-some real, and others imaginary. Always thinking what if this were to happen, or that were to happen.

These projections, turn into bogeys of fear and we get into the habit of imagining the worst.

If we were to consider the situation rationally we would say, "It is lucky that no one got hurt".

"Fortunately the matchstick went out before it could set off a fire".

"Thank heavens, the knife missed the foot".

"It is a good thing that she escaped with minor injuries".

That is not to say that we should be careless and let things happen, or go in any way. We should not take unnecessary risks in the foolhardy belief that nothing will happen.

We must take appropriate care to prevent accidents or untoward incidents; and if they do occur, act accordingly. But to live in a constant fear of "What if..." will be the end of us.

It is only a matter of changing perspective; of viewing a situation from the brighter side, and not the other side with its lurking devils of "what if.....".

## You Never Listen

"Ma, I've been asking you to serve me those, but you are not listening. Then don't scold me if I get up without eating properly".

Little Leela was whining as she ate.

Leela is seven years old. A bright girl, who understands a lot, and expresses herself clearly.

Leela has four brothers and sisters. Along with their father they all have their meals together. Mother would like to give them all hot *chapatis* as they eat. But she would also like to sit down with them and join in all the talk and laughter.

The family keeps wanting something or the other as they eat. One wants water, the other wants pickle. Some one needs salt, the other would like some curd. Between fetching and giving, and making and serving the *chapatis* mother is in a flurry.

Amidst the noise and confusion of the dining table, little Leela's words could have got lost.

But they struck a chord and set me thinking.

"What can be done", I thought to myself. "The little girl's small request seems to get lost somewhere. Maybe because

her mother has not heard her at all, or perhaps because her attention is torn between too many simultaneous requests. It is not fair to blame the mother. But how can Leela be helped?

One way could be that mother cooks everything beforehand and just serves the family at mealtime. Mother is keen on hot *rotis* for her family. I would say that she should either function at supersonic speed, or compromise on hot *rotis* for all.

No doubt, a hot meal is most welcome, even desirable. But equally important is that children should enjoy their meals and mealtimes. They may prefer that mother should sit down to share the meal with the rest of the family, rather than have her make hot *rotis*.

## Cross Currents

"Hey, Ramu, where are you off to?"

"Uncle said that I should go and play in the shade near that window". "Don't play there. Go and sit near the corner of the wall".

"Arre, Ramu, what are you doing, sitting around in that corner? Come inside and start studying your lessons".

"But mother said I could play here".

"Well get up and start studying".

"Oy, Ramu, is this the time to start your lessons? Go for your bath. The water is hot". "But father told me to sit and study". "Study later, bathe first".

"Ramu, Ramu, don't go in for your bath. Just go with this gentleman and show him where Shankar uncle's house is". "But didi told me to bathe first". "Just go and come back quickly. Then you can bathe".

Poor Ramu. One to listen, ten to tell!

Ramu is young. All the others are older. Everyone thinks they can tell Ramu what to do. After all, when they were young, did not the elders tell them what to do? Now they have earned the right to tell someone younger.

Fair enough. The privilege of age. But what about young Ramu, caught up in the cross fire?

No sooner does he start to do something, he has to drop it to do something else, and a third, and a fourth.... Ultimately, not one of the tasks get completed. Ramu does not have the satisfaction, or pleasure, of seeing one activity through.

And Ramu is amazed at the jumble of messages that fly back and forth. He wonders if all the so called "wise" adults really know what they want.

Ramu is too young to point out the contradictions to the adults. But he certainly learns something from the situation.

If we looked again at the crossed orders that Ramu was caught in, we will find that the household is governed neither by autocracy nor democracy. Each member is a law unto himself. One suggests, that next one overrules, and the third has yet another suggestion. There is no basic respect for one member's viewpoint. Result: confusion in communication.

And what will Ramu learn about? Confusion or order? To obey whom? Whom to disobey?

This is not an uncommon situation in many houses. Some system must prevail for orderly running of a household. No doubt, in case of serious issues and decisions, there needs to be consultation and discussion; for some areas division of responsibility and delegation of tasks is essential.

Whatever the situation, the younger members should not become the centre of the adults' cross communication.

## Aunty Is Calling You Inside

I still recall that incident from my childhood. A friend had come over to play with me. We were playing outside when elder sister came to tell me that my aunt was calling me inside.

I went in. Aunt gave me a *badam puri*. "Sit here in the corner and eat it up", she said. "Your friend is outside".

I did not like the idea of eating it all by myself. "I will eat it later", I told aunty.

"Just eat it up fast", said aunt. "Hurry, or else your friend will follow you inside".

I could not do much in the face of her insistence, and gobbled up the *puri*.

My friend was eagerly waiting for me. We went back to playing, and then he went home.

Years went by, but often, I got the strange feeling that I was eating something secretly, hidden from my friend. I felt I was committing a secret crime. I kept wondering why I had agreed to my aunt's suggestion, and how that act had made me feel, for years, like a petty thief.

As I grew, I felt a great anger at my aunt. To make me feel thus, just for a piece of *puri*, to discourage me from sharing with my friend.

Recently I went to my relative's place. I saw history repeating itself. The wife told her little daughter to call the son and ask him to drink some *sherbat*.

"Tell him that aunty is calling him to help sort out the vegetables", she instructed. The boy came in and had his drink.

He was too young to have given the incident much thought.

But the aunt was not, she was old enough to know that she was telling a lie, and asking a young child to participate in the lie.

I thought, "Forty years have gone by. Nothing has changed. A whole generation apart, but there is no difference between my aunt and this boy's aunt.

It scared me to think that, in fact, things would not change much, even forty years hence. The 'aunts' will continue to inculcate informal education, while schools continue to preach and teach the virtues of truth and honesty. Even where the teacher's personality is powerful, where children hold them up as 'role models,' the insidious influence of numerous 'aunts' and 'uncles' are pervasive.

What value ethics and moral education when children are also being told to tell petty lies, and eat in secret, hidden from friends?

How long will mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles teach their own children, often unwillingly, such petty deceptions, and sometimes only for a bite or a sip?

## Confidence Crisis

The child picks up the vessel and carefully carries it to give the mother. Mother says, "Leave it, you won't be able to carry it".

The young boy strenuously clammers up two rungs of the ladder. As he raises his foot to reach the third rung, the father says, "Come down, you are too young to climb ladders. If you fall you will break a few bones".

The little girl carefully wields the knife to chop vegetables or sharpen a pencil. The mother scolds. "Put down that knife, don't take on the work of adults".

The child exclaims proudly, "Look! I Jumped across this big ditch." "See, I can lift this heavy rock!" Someone in the house will say, "Look at this ant showing off".

The door is jammed. The child says, "Here let me try. I'll open it". Everyone laughs and jokes, "Hear, hear, the muscleman speaks".

The adults are trying to solve a problem. As they discuss, the child offers some suggestions. All say, "Now you don't try to act too big for your boots".

The daughter wants to put the *dal* and vegetable on the fire. Mother says, "You will get scalded". She says, "Can I

I help clean the rice?" Mother says, "You will spill it all, you don't know how to".

Every day in innumerable situations, we react in this fashion, unknowingly squashing the natural confidence of our children.

Children want to learn certain things at a particular time. This is the point what their enthusiasm is the highest. Their interest in the activity is fuelled by a strong inner urge to learn, and an innate curiosity in the process. All this combines to focus their concentration on the task, and carry it out with care and attention.

If at this point they are suddenly made conscious of what could happen in the process, they become overly conscious of their actions, and this disturbs their natural concentration and attention to the task.

But if children get to do activities that interest them, it shows in the joy on their face and the movement of their body. At each step in the undertaking, their confidence in themselves grows and bursts into declarations of "I can do it..." "I know how"... "let me try....".

Often this is where we stop them. This may result in tantrums, confrontation, even punishment. Repeated frequently, this action and reaction serves to erode the child's confidence. Until the child almost begins to fear the task itself.

Everytime it takes up the task, it hears echoes of the parents, cautionary warnings, and drops it forthwith

overcome by the fear that it will not be able to successfully accomplish the task.

If someone asked it to bring the vessel, or the chair, it refuses. If forced to do so, the thing slips and falls from its hands. The child is in tears. When asked why, it emerges that it is ashamed at its own inadequacy to carry out the task.

I have come across innumerable such impasses. One example will suffice.

Chandu's mother had injected him with a high dose of confidence crisis.

I would say, "Let's go onto the bridge."

He would say, "I can't go there, I will drown."

"Who said so?"

"My mother did."

I would call, "Bring that rock, son."

"I can't."

"Why?", I would ask.

"I won't be able to lift it".

"How do you know?"

"My mother says so".

"Well, I think you could. Let's give it a try", I would urge.

It was only when we actually did that task, together that the boy was convinced that he could. His eyes lit up with the discovery, and he lapsed into thought. From that day on, that ray of renewed confidence changed his entire demeanour.

By corroding our children's confidence, we truly do make them unable to perform. In some ways our lack of confidence or trust in our children is a reflection of our own lack of confidence.

We need to have the strength to have confidence in our children. Encouraged by that trust, our children will prove themselves more than worthy of what we have bestowed.

A child is human, a human striving to grow. We must enable this growth, the blossoming of its personality.

Let us have the confidence to give confidence to our children.

## What Do Children Like ?

What do children like? Order or chaos? Quiet or clamour? Activity or inactivity?

People believe that children like disorder because they are disorderly and create disorder. But that is not true. Children like order because human beings, by nature, like order.

Children are confused, often overwhelmed by chaos. It is us adults that do not always provide an orderly environment for the child. The child is too young to create order out of chaos and so, it attempts to create its own paths through the disorderly maze within which it must function.

And we blame the mess on the child.

The child's disorderliness is a reflection of its own confusion, and a creation of the chaotic environment that we have provided.

People believe that children like noise and confusion; that children do not like silence; that they are too restless to be quiet and still.

That also is not true. Too much noise upsets children. Their senses are disturbed by din, it stresses them. All day their ears are assaulted by a barrage of noises and sounds, including those of people talking loudly, even shouting, around them.

In all this din the child has no option but to shout, if only to make itself heard. It is the only way the child knows to pierce the cacaphony that envelops it. It has to join in and add to the noise.

People believe that children do not like to work and have must be forced to do some. That is a fallacy.

Children, by nature are active but in the world of adults, they do not find the avenues to direct this activity, nor the instruments to work with, nor the place to do things.

Adults are always yelling, "What are you doing?" "Why did you go up there?" "Why did you take that?"

"Every time the child embarks upon an activity, there is an adult admonishing it for one thing or another. And so, many children opt for the path of not doing anything. And adults call them inactive.

When adults are so distrustful of what a child does, how will they even find out what the child knows, and what it can do?

So children do not get the opportunity to do what they can do, what they like to do, what they are well equipped to do. Instead, they are pushed into doing what they cannot do, nor enjoy, nor understand.

Little wonder then, that children prefer not to do anything at all. And adults conclude that children do not like to work. In all this, the great potential in the child remains untapped and unharnessed.



## **If You Really Want To**

If you would like to do just one thing for children....

What could you do?

Do not hit children.

If you would like to do two things. What could you do?

Do not scold children.

Do not insult them.

If you wanted to do three things. what to do?

Do not scare children.

Do not bribe them to do something.

Do not overIndulge them.

If you would like to do four things for children.

What would these be?

Do not preach to children.

Do not blow hot and cold.

Do not keep finding fault.

Do no exercise authority all the time.

If you are keen to do five things. What will you do?

Do not do whatever the child demands, teach it to do for itself.

Let the child do what it desires to do.

Do not take a child's work lightly.

Do not interfere into a child's work.

Do not take away a child's work.